A

LETTER

OF

Mr. *JOHN COTTONS*

Teacher of the Church in *Boſton*,

IN

NEVV-ENGLAND,

TO

Mr. *WILLIAMS* a Preacher there.

Wherein is ſhewed,

That thoſe ought to be received into the Church who are Godly, though they doe not ſee, nor expreſſely bewaile all the pollutions in Church-fellowſhip, *Miniſtery, Worſhip, Government.*

Imprimatur, *John Bachiler.*

Printed at *London* for *Benjamin Allen.* 1643.

HARVARD COLLEGE LIBRARY
FROM THE LIBRARY
OF F. L. GAY
NOV. 3, 1916

A Letter of Mr. *John Cottons*, Teacher of the Church in *Boston*, in *New England*.

Beloved in Christ,

THough I have little hope (when I consider the uncircumcision of mine owne lips, *Exod.* 6.12.) that you will hearken to my voyce, who hath not hearkened to the body of the whole Church of Christ with you, and the testimony, and judgement of so many Elders and Brethren of other Churches, yet I trust my labour will be accepted of the Lord, and who can tell but that he may blesse it to you also, if (by his helpe) I indevour to shew you the sandinesse of those grounds, out of which you have banished yours from the fellowship of all the Churches in these Countries. Let not any prejudice against my person (I beseech you) forestall either your affection or judgement, as if I had hastened forward the sentence of your civill banishment; for what was done by the Magistrates, in that kinde, was neither done by my counsell nor consent, although I dare not deny the sentence passed to be righteous in the eyes of God, who hath said that he that with-holdeth the Corne (which is the staffe of life) from the people, the multitude shall curse him, *Prov.* 11. 26. how much more shall they separate such from them as doe with-hold and separate them from the Ordinances, or the Ordinances from them (which are in Christ the bread

of life.) And yet it may be they paſſed that ſentence againſt you not upon that ground, but for ought I know, upon your other corrupt doctrines, which tend to the diſturbance both of civill and holy peace, as may appeare by that anſwer which was ſent to the Brethren of the Church of *Salem*, and to your ſelfe. And to ſpeake freely what I thinke, were my ſoule in your ſoules ſtead, I ſhould thinke it a worke of mercy of God to baniſh me from the civill ſociety of ſuch a Common wealth, when I could not injoy holy fellowſhip with any Church of God amongſt them without ſin. What ſhould the Daughter of *Zion* doe in *Babell*? why ſhould ſhe not haſten to flee from thence? *Zach.* 2.6,7.

I ſpeake not theſe things (the God of Truth is my witnes) to adde affliction to your affliction, but (if it were the holy will of God) to move you to a more ſerious ſight of your ſin, and of the juſtice of Gods hand againſt it. Againſt your corrupt Doctrines, it pleaſed the Lord Jeſus to fight againſt you with the ſword of his mouth (as himſelfe ſpeaketh, *Rev.* 2. 16.) in the mouthes and teſtimonies of the Churches and Brethren. Againſt whom, when you over-heated your ſelfe in reaſoning and diſputing againſt the light of his truth, it pleaſed him to ſtop your mouth by a ſuddaine diſeaſe, and to threaten to take your breath from you. But you in ſtead of recoyling (as even *Balaam* offered to doe in the like caſe) you choſe rather to perſiſt in your way, and to proteſt againſt all the Churches and Brethren that ſtood in your way: and thus the good hand of Chriſt that ſhould have humbled you, to ſee and turne from the errour of your way, hath rather hardned you therein, and quickned you onely to ſee failings (yea intolerable errours) in all the Churches and brethren, rather then in your ſelfe. In which courſe though you ſay you doe not remember an houre wherein the countenance of the Lord was darkned to you, yet be not deceived, it is no

new

new thing with Satan to transforme himselfe into an Angell of light, and to cheare the soule with false peace, and with flashes of counterfeit consolation. Sad and wofull is the memory of Master *Smiths* strong consolations on his death-bed, which are set as a Scale to the grosse and damnable Arminianisme and Enthusiasmes delivered in the confession of his faith, prefixed to the story of his life and death. The countenance of God is upon his people when they feare him, not when they presume of their owne strength; and his consolations are found not in the way of presidence in errour, but in the wayes of humility and truth.

Two stumbling blockes (I perceive by your letter) have turned you off from fellowship with us. First, the want of fit matter of our Church. Secondly, disrespect of the separate Churches in England under afflictions, who doe ourselves practise separation in peace.

'For the first, you acknowledge (as you say) with 'joy that godly persons are the visible matter of these 'Churches, but yet you see not that godly persons are 'matter fitted to constitute a Church; no more then 'trees or Quarries are fit matter proportioned to the 'building.

Answ. This exception seemeth to mee to imply a contradiction to it selfe, for if the matter of our Churches be as you say godly persons, they are not then as trees unfelled, or stones unhewen. Godlinesse cutteth men downe from the former roote, and heweth them out of the pit of corrupt nature, and fitteth them for fellowship with Christ and with his people.

'You object, first, a necessity lying upon godly men 'before they can be fit matter for Church fellowship, 'to see, bewaile, repent, and come out of the false Chur-

'ches ministry, worship and government, according to 'Scripture, *Isa.* 52. 11. 2 *Cor.* 6. 17. *Revel.* 18. 4. And those 'this to be done not by a locall remoovall or contrary 'practise, &c. but by a deliverance of the soule, under-'standing, minde, conscience, judgement, will and affe-'ctions.

Answ. 1. We grant it is not locall remoovall from former pollutions, or contrary practise, that fitteth us for fellowship with Christ and his Church, but that it is necessary also that we doe repent of such former pollutions wherein we have beene defiled and inthralled.

Wee grant further that it is likewise necessary to Church-fellowship, we should see and discerne all such pollutions as doe so farre enthrall us to Antichrist, to separate us from Christ.

But this we professe unto you, that wherein we have reformed our practise, therein have we endeavoured unfainedly to humble our soules for our former contrary walking. If any through hypocrisie are wanting herein, the hidden hypocrisie of some will not prejudice the sinceritie and faithfulnesse of others, nor the Church estate of all.

And that we doe (by the grace of Christ) see and discerne all such pollutions as doe so farre enthrall us to Antichrist as to separate us from Christ; your selfe doth acknowledge in acknowledging the visible members of these Churches to be godly persons; for godly persons are not so enthralled to Antichrist, as to separate them from Christ, else they could not be godly persons.

Answ. 2. We deny that it is necessary to Church-fellowship (to wit, so necessary as that without it, a Church cannot be) that the members admitted thereunto should all of them see, expressely bewaile all the

polluti-

pollutions which they have beene defiled with in the former Church-fellowship, ministery, worship, government. If they see and bewaile so much of their former pollutions as did enthrall them to Antichrist, as to separate them from Christ, and be ready in preparation of heart, as they shall see more light, so to hate more and more every false way, we conceive it is as much as is necessarily required to separation from Antichrist, and to fellowship with Christ and his Churches. The Churches of *Iudea* admitted many thousand Jewes that believed on the name of Christ, although they were still zealous of the Law, and saw not the beggerly emptinesse of *Moses* his ceremonies, *Act.* 21. 20. And the Apostle *Paul* directeth the Romans to receive such unto them as are weake in the faith, and see not their liberty from the servile difference of meats and dayes, but still lie under the bondage of the Law, yea he wisheth them to receive such upon this ground, because Christ hath received them, *Rom.* 14. 1. to 6.

Say not, there is not the like danger of lying under bondage to *Moses* as to Antichrist, for even the bondage under *Moses* was such, as if they continued in after instruction and conviction, would separate them from Christ, *Gal.* 5. 2. And bondage under Antichrist could doe no more.

Answ. 3. To the places of Scripture which you object, *Isa.* 52. 11. 2 *Cor.* 6. 17. *Revel.* 18. 4. we answer, two of them make nothing to your purpose, for that of *Esay* and the other of the *Revelation*, speake of locall separation, which your selfe knoweth we have made, and yet you say you doe not apprehend that to be sufficient. As for that place of the *Corinths*, it onely requireth comming out from Idolaters in the fellowship of their Idolatry. No marriages were they to make with them: no feasts were they to hold with them in the Idols Temple: no intimate familiaritie were they to

maintaine

maintaine with them: nor any fellowship were they to keepe with them in the unfruitfull workes of darkenesse; and this is all which that place requireth. But what makes all this to prove that we may not receive such persons to Church-fellowship as our selves confesse to be godly, and who doe professedly renounce and bewaile all knowne sinne, and would renounce more if they knew more, although it may be they doe not yet see the utmost skirts of all that pollution they have sometimes beene defiled with; as the Patriarchs saw not the pollution of their Polygamie? But that you may plainely see this place is wrested beside the Apostles scope, when you argue from it that such persons are not fit matter of Church-fellowship, as are defiled with any remnants of Antichristian pollution; nor such Churches any more to be accounted Churches, as doe receive such amongst them; Consider I pray you, were there not at that time in the Church of *Corinth* such as partaked with Idolaters in their Idols Temples? and was not this the touching of an uncleane thing? and did this sinne reject these members from Church fellowship before conviction? or did it evacuate their Church estate for not casting out of such members?

2. Your second objection is taken from the confession of ' sinnes made by *Johns* Disciples, and the proselyte Gentiles ' before admission into Church-fellowship, *Matth.* 3. 6. *Act.* ' 19. 18. whence you gather that Christian Churches are ' constituted of such members as make open and plaine con- ' fession of their sinnes; and if any sinnes be to be confes- ' sed and lamented, (Jewish, or Paganish) then Antichristian ' drunkennesse, and whoredome much more, of all such as ' have drunke of the whores cup, or but sipt of it. And ' therefore as persons, though godly, are not made fit for the ' Church, if open drunkennesse or whoredome lie upon

' them

'them, yea or but one act of either, untill conviction, true
'repentance, confeſſion, and renunciation of their wayes
'be diſcerned: ſo here.

And yet as if you had graſped more then you could hold, you let fall ſome part of what you had aſſumed, and doe grant, that

'Such a confeſſion and renunciation is not abſolute ne-
'ceſſary to the admiſſion of members, (though the want of
'it be a grievous offence) if the ſubſtance of true repentance
'be diſcerned.

Anſw. 1. If ſuch a confeſſion and renunciation be not of abſolute neceſſity to the admiſſion of members when the ſubſtance of true repentance is diſcerned, then ſuch Congregations may be true Churches (by your owne confeſſion) who doe admit for their members ſuch godly perſons as doe profeſſe and hold forth the ſubſtance of true repentance; for ſuch perſons profeſſing their repentance for all their knowne and open ſinnes, doe withall profeſſe their readineſſe to repent of and forſake whatſoever further ſinnes ſhall be diſcovered to them.

Anſ. 2. When you judge that godly perſons are not matter fitted for the Church, untill firſt they be illuminated and convinced of the ſinfulneſſe of every ſipping of the whores cup; you take away with the one hand what you granted with the other, and withall you impoſe a burthen upon the Church of Chriſt, which Chriſt never required at their hands nor yours.

For we deny that it is neceſſary to the admiſſion of members that every one ſhould be convinced of the ſinfulneſſe of every ſipping of the Whores cup, for every ſipping of a drunkards cup is not ſinfull; and though the cup of the whore doe more intoxicate the mind then the drunkards cup doth the body, yet you know bodily drunkenneſſe and

whoredome are ſuch notorious and groſſe ſinnes that no man that hath any true repentance in him, cannot but bee convinced of the ſinfulneſſe of them, and of the neceſſity of repentance of them in particular. But the Whores cup being a myſtery of iniquity, the ſinfulneſſe of it, is nothing ſo evident and notorious as that every true repentant ſoule doth at firſt diſcerne the filthineſſe of it: and therefore as thoſe three thouſand Jewes and Proſelytes were admitted into the fellowſhip of the firſt Chriſtian Church, when they repented of their murther of Chriſt, although they never ſaw nor confeſſed all the ſuperſtitious leavenings wherewith the Phariſees had bewitched them, *Act.* 2. 37 to 47. ſo doubtleſſe may ſuch godly perſons be admitted into the fellowſhip of our Churches, who doe truely repent and confeſſe their greateſt and moſt notorious ſins, although they be not yet convinced of every paſſage of Antichriſtian ſuperſtition, wherewith they have beene defiled in their former walkings.

The Diſciples of *John* (whom you inſtance in) did indeed confeſſe their ſinnes, the Publicans their ſinnes, the Souldiers theirs, the People theirs, but yet it doth not appeare that they confeſſed their Phariſaicall pollutions, but rather the notorious ſinnes, incident to their callings, as did alſo thoſe Gentiles of whom you ſpeake, *Act.* 19. 18, 19. Conjurers confeſſed their curious Arts, and others their deeds, but whether all their deeds, is not expreſſed.

Anſw. 3. But to ſatisfie you more fully (and the Lord make you willing in true meekeneſſe of Spirit to receive ſatisfaction) the body of the members whom we receive, doe in generall profeſſe, the reaſon of their comming over to us was, that they might be freed from the bondage of ſuch humane inventions and ordinances as their ſoules groaned under, for which alſo they profeſſe their hearty ſorrow, ſo far

as

as through ignorance or infirmity they have beene defiled. Besides, in our daily meetings, and especially in times of our solemne humiliations, we generally all of us bewaile all our former pollutions, wherewith we have defiled our selves, and the holy things of God, in our former Administrations and Communions, but wee rather choose to doe it, than to talke of it, and wee cannot but wonder how you can so boldly and resolutely renounce the Churches of Christ, for neglect of that, which you know not whether they have neglected or no, and before you have admonished us of our sinfulnesse in such neglect, if it be found amongst us.

Object. 3. Your third Objection is taken from *Hag.* 2. 13, 14, 15. a 'place which you desire may be throughly weighed, and that the 'Lord would hold the scales himselfe. The Prophet there tels the 'Church of the Jewes, that if a person uncleane by a dead body, touch 'holy things, those holy things become uncleane unto him, and so, 'saith he, is this Nation, and so is every worke of their hands, and 'that which they offer there is uncleane. And this (as you conceive) 'argueth that even Church Covenants made, and Ordinances pra-'ctised by persons polluted through spirituall deadnesse and filthinesse 'of Communion, they become uncleane unto them, and are pro-'phaned by them.

Answ. Now surely if your selfe had hearkned to your owne desire, and had throughly weighed the Scripture, and had suffered the Lord to have held the scales himselfe, you would never have alledged this place to your purpose. Your purpose was to prove that Churches connot be constituted by such persons as are uncleane by antichristian pollutions, or if they be so constituted, they are not to be communicated with, but separated from: To prove this you alledge this place; when the Prophet acknowledgeth the whole Church of the Jewes to be uncleane, and yet neither denyeth them to be a Church truely constituted, nor stirreth up himselfe or others to separate from them.

If you say, why but they were uncleane? I Answer, be it so, but were they therefore no Church truely constituted, or to be separated from? yea did not *Haggai* and *Zachary* themselves communicate with them, and call others also to come out of *Babell* to communicate with them, even whilest *Joshua* the High Priest was still polluted with his unclean garments, *Zac.* 2. 6, 7. with 6. 3. 8. 3. But if indeed you desire to know, what upon due weighing of the place, I conceive to be the meaning of it, you shall finde it to be this; The occasion of the words a-

rise from a worldly distemper, which the time grew upon, all sorts of the members of that Church, who were so farre carryed away with care of their owne outward accommodations, that while every man looked to his owne house, and the seiling of it, the Temple of the Lord and the building thereof was generally neglected of them all, Prince, Priest, and People, whence it was that God neither delighted in their spirituall services, nor in their bodily labours, but left them without a blessing in both, *Hagg.* 1. 6. to 11. Now to cleare the justice of Gods proceeding against them in that case, he alledgeth a secondable law for it, out of *Moses*; The former is written in *Levit.* 6. 27. where the Law saith, that a garment touching any holy flesh of the sin offering should be holy. But if the garment which toucheth holy flesh shall touch other things, as the person that weareth it, or any pottage, or Bread, or wine, or any touch of other common thing, the thing touched is not thereby hallowed by the touch of such a garment.

Againe, there was another Law, that whosoever touched any uncleane body, should be uncleane seven dayes, and if in that time hee touched the Tabernacle, or the holy things thereof, they shall be uncleane, *Numb.* 19. 13. Now (to apply these Lawes to the scope of the Prophet) the touch of a dead body did type out either fellowship with dead workes, as *Ephes.* 5. 11. or dead persons, 2 *Cor.* 6. 14, 15, 16, 17. or dead world, *Gal.* 6. 14. but of these three, it was the dead world wherewith Priest and Prince and all the people were at that time generally defiled, in that they tooke more care and paines for worldly conveniences, then for the Lords holy Ordinances. Whereupon according to the answer of the Priest, agreeable to the Law, the Prophet pronounceth them, in the sight of the Lord, all to be uncleane.

From both these Lawes, and the Interpretation of them by the Priest, and the application of them by the Prophet, it appeareth that there were two sorts of these people, and both uncleane. Some that did not touch the holy flesh, or offerings, but on the outside of their garments onely, to wit, in bodily presence (and the body is but the garment of the Soule) 1 *Cor.* 5. 4. and such were all the Hypocrites amongst them: Others were sincere, as worshipping God in firme Truth, as *Zorobabell*, *Jehoshua*, and many more, but yet now defiled with touching a dead body, that is, with laying hold on a dead world, their worldly accommodations, which made their hearts and hands slow or dead to set forward the Temple worke, and in this condition

both

both ſorts, their perſons, their oblations, their bodily labours, were all uncleane, and found neither acceptance nor bleſſing from the Lord, till the Lord ſtirred up the Spirits of them all to addreſſe themſelves more ſeriouſly to the Temple worke, *Hag.* 1. 12, 13, 14.

This I take to be the true and genuine meaning of the place, which if you apply to the point in hand, will reach nothing neare to your purpoſe. Hypocrites in the Church, and godly Chriſtians themſelves, whilſt they attend to the world more then to the things of God, their perſons, their labours, their civill oblations are all uncleane in the ſight of God; therefore the Church of Chriſt cannot be conſtituted of ſuch, or if it doe conſiſt of ſuch, the people of God muſt ſeparate from them. You might well have gathered, therefore, the Church of Chriſt and the members thereof muſt ſeparate themſelves from their hypocriſie, and inordinate love of this world, or elſe they and their duties will ſtill be uncleane in the ſight of God, notwithſtanding their Church eſtate. This collection tendeth to edification, the other to diſſipation and deſtruction of the Church, and of them that wreſt blood in ſtead of milke from the breaſts of holy Scripture.

The ſecond ſtumbling blocke or offence which you take at the way ‘ of theſe Churches is, that you conceive us to walke betwixt Chriſt ‘ and Antichriſt.

‘ Firſt, in practiſing ſeparation here, and not repenting of our ‘ preaching and printing againſt it in our own country.

‘ Secondly, in reproaching your ſelfe at *Salem* and others for ſe‘ paration.

‘ Thirdly, in particular, that my ſelfe have conceived and ſpoken, ‘ that ſeparation is a way that God hath not proſpered, as if (ſay you) ‘ the truth of the Churches way depended upon countenance of men, ‘ or upon outward peace and liberty.

Anſw. 1. In ſtead of halting betwixt Chriſt and Antichriſt, wee conceive the Lord hath guided us to walke with an even foote betweene two extreames; ſo that we neither defile our ſelves with the remnant of pollutions in other Churches, nor doe wee for the remnant of pollutions renounce the Churches themſelves, nor the holy ordinances of God amongſt them, which our ſelves have found powerfull to our ſalvation. This moderation, ſo farre as we have kept it in preaching or printing, wee ſee no cauſe to repent of, but if you ſhew us cauſe why we ſhould repent of it, wee ſhall deſire to repent that we repented no ſooner.

2. I know no man that reproacheth *Salem* for their ſeparation, nor doe I beleeve that they doe ſeparate. Howſoever if any doe reproach them for it, I thinke it a ſinne meet to be cenſured, but not with ſo deepe a cenſure as to excommunicate all the Churches, or to ſeparate from them before it doe appeare that they doe tolerate their members in ſuch their cauſeleſſe reproachings. Wee confeſſe the errours of men are to be contended againſt, not with reproaches, but the ſword of the Spirit; but on the other ſide, the failings of the Churches (if any be found) are not forthwith to be healed by ſeparation. It is not Chirurgery, but Butchery, to heale every ſore in a member with no other medicine but abciſſion from the body.

3. For my ſelfe, I acknowledge the words which you mention, that the way of ſeparation is not a way that God hath proſpered. But you much miſtake, when you thinke I ſpeake it for want of their outward countenance, peace and liberty. The truth is, they finde more favour in our native country then the way of reformation wherein we walke, which is commonly reproached by the name of Puritaniſme. The meetings of the Separatiſts may be knowne to the Officers in the Courts and winked at, when the Conventicles of the puritans (as they call them) ſhall be hunted out with all diligence, and purſued with more violence then any law will juſtifie. But I ſaid that God had not proſpered the way of ſeparation, becauſe he hath not bleſſed it either with peace amongſt themſelves, or with growth of grace; ſuch as erring through ſimplicitie and tenderneſſe of conſcience have growne in grace, have growne alſo to diſcerne their lawfull liberty to returne to the hearing of the word from Engliſh Preachers.

Obj. But this (you feare) is to condemne the witneſſes of Jeſus (the ſeparate Churches in London and elſewhere) and our jealous God will viſit us for ſuch arrerages, yea the curſe of his Angel from *Meroz* will fall upon us, becauſe we come not forth to helpe Jehovah againſt the mighty, we pray not for them, wee come not at them, (but at Pariſhes frequently) yea we reproach and cenſure them.

Anſw. The Lord Jeſus never delivered that way of ſeparation to which they beare witneſſe, nor any of his Apoſtles after him, nor of his Prophets before him. So farre as in that way they hold or practiſe any holy truths, wee beare witneſſe to them both in our profeſſion and practiſe. The Angels curſe in this caſe (wee bleſſe God) we doe not feare, becauſe we doe come forth (according to the meaſure of grace given us) to helpe the Lord againſt the mighty, although we doe not come forth to helpe them againſt Jehovah. It is not to

helpe

helpe Jehovah, but Satan againſt him, to withdraw the people of God from hearing the voyce of Chriſt which is preached in the evidence, and ſimplicity, and power of his Spirit in ſundry Congregations (though they be Pariſhes) in our native Country. In which reſpect, though our people that goe over into England, chooſe rather to heare in ſome of the Pariſhes where the voyce of Chriſt is lifted up like a trumpet, then in the ſeparated Churches (where ſome of us may ſpeak by experience we have not found the like preſence of Chriſt, or evidence of his Spirit) do not you marvaile, or ſtumble at it: Chriſts ſheepe heare his voyce. If any careleſſely heare at randome, making no difference betwixt the voyce of Chriſt and the voyce of ſtrangers, or if they ſhall ſtoope to any defilements of themſelves, that ſo they may heare a good Preacher; as I know none ſuch, ſo neither doe any of us approve them in ſo doing.

That wee doe not pray for the ſeparate Churches by name, it is becauſe we cannot pray in faith for a bleſſing upon their ſeparation, which we ſee not to be of God nor to be led to him. If any reproach them, I will not goe about to excuſe it, onely they may doe well to conſider, whether they alſo have not reproached others.

If there bee ſo many ſeparate Churches in London and in other parts of the Kingdome (as you write) it is little comfort to the true ſervants of Chriſt to heare that either ſuch inventions of men are multiplyed, as like ſtumbling blockes doe turne any well minded men out of the way, or that ſuch men being deſirous of reformation, ſhould ſtumble, not onely at the inventions of men, but for their ſakes at the ordinances of the Lord; which appeareth the more evidently, becauſe they ſeparate not onely from hearing the word in all the Pariſhes, but alſo from fellowſhip (as your ſelfe ſay) both of the Church of *Plymouth*, and of that whereof Maſter *Lathorpe* was Paſtor, and yet they refuſe all the inventions of men, and chooſe to ſerve the Lord in his owne Ordinances onely. Now truely Sir, (to uſe your owne words) I feare this newes pleaſeth not the Lord Jeſus, and therefore the more inwardly ſorry I am, that it pleaſeth you rather to returne to them, not to helpe the Lord againſt the mighty, to wit, either againſt the high Prelates, or againſt the inventions of men, as you ſuppoſe, for that you might have done here, or in *Plymouth*, or in Maſter *Lathorpes* Congregation; but to helpe erring though zealous ſoules againſt the mightie Ordinances of the Lord, which whoſoever ſtumble at ſhall be broken; for whoſoever will not kiſſe the Sunne, (that is, will not heare and imbrace the words of his mouth) ſhall periſh in their way, *Pſal.* 2. 12.

FINIS.